

Madam Queen and her family in one pen, and Timmy in another. There was Brunnhilde, the black hen, scratching in her own little patch of ground; and nearby the other chickens, Leghorns, were behaving in the half-witted way that chickens do: scratching, pausing on one foot and shooting startled glances at nothing in particular, scratching again, and pausing, and clucking dreamily all the while.

Beyond the barnyard were the pastures; the cows were in one with all their heads bent to the grass; and in the other the horses galloped joyously in circles.

Beyond the Hausers' farm the river wound like a path made out of looking glass. All over the valley, as far as the eye could see, the corn had been cut and was stacked in wigwam shapes. The woods, still green on the hillsides were deep and shadowy, but everything else was the color of gold.

"Eric," said day suddenly, "what are you going to do when you grow up?"

"What I do now, just about," replied Eric promptly. "I have it all planned. I'm going to work hard for your father as long as he'll let me, and save every penny I make. Someday maybe I'll get a farm of my own. In this valley I'd like it to be; near your father's and about the same size and style as his."

Garnet stole a glance at Jay from the tail of her eye. What would he say now?

"Eric, what do you want to be a farmer for?" he asked disappointedly. "There's no adventure to that; that's no way to see the world."

"I've seen plenty of the world, thanks" said Eric. "Plenty of adventure too, a you want to call it that. I like this better. I want to stay right here for years and years and years. And you know anyway, I like farming. Someday when I get one of my own, I'm

going to have goats on it like my father did, and sheep, too, maybe, But I dunno, maybe not. Anyway I'll have hogs, and cows, and a team, but no hens except Brunnhilde, because she's the only one I ever saw that had some sense. Maybe I'll have just one rooster. A farm isn't a farm without a rooster to let you know when he feels the day coming."

"Aw, there's always trouble on a farm," grumbled Jay. "Blight, and stock diseases, and bugs, and drought."

"Drought!" said Eric scornfully. "That was a puny little drought you had here. You've never had trouble: you're darn lucky and you remember I said it. Why, I've seen rivers dried up and shrunk away to nothing, and the earth all full of cracks, and cattle dead for want of water. Yes, and in Kansas I've watched a wall of dust roll up from off the prairie black as your hat and high as the sky. We had to tie rags over our faces when it hit us, and even then it got into our eyes and mouths. You felt it between your teeth, and down the back of your neck and in your pockets! After a few of those the farms that had been green and fine looked like the Sahara Desert. You don't know what trouble is, Jay."

There was a chokecherry tree that grew up out of the pigpen, and whose feathery top branches almost swept the roof. Jay leaned over and pulled off a sprig and chewed the bitter fruit reflectively.

"Well, I don't know," he said after a while. "Maybe you've got the right idea: but I still think I'd like to travel some, and see the world. But maybe when I got that out of my system I'd like to come back and farm with father. If you bought land next to ours we might work it all together and be partners and have a swell place. What do you think?"

Eric smiled with pleasure.

"It sounds okay to me," he said. "We'll all be partners; Garnet too if she wants."

Garnet felt pleased. She laid down her hammer and put her hands in her pockets. She found in one of them the silver thimble that she had brought to show Eric. She pulled it out and put it on her finger.

"Look Eric," she said. "I found this in the river on one of the mud flats that came up during the dry spell. It's solid silver and it's very valuable. You know why, Eric?" she leaned towards him and said defiantly. "Because it's magic, that's why. Jay says there's no such thing but he doesn't know. There is something wonderful about this thimble; everything began to happen as soon as I found it, why that very night the rain came and the drought was broken! And right after that we got money to build this barn, and you saw our kiln fire in the woods and came to be in our family. And then Citronella and I got locked in the Library, that was exciting, and I went to New Conniston by myself. That was an adventure, too, even if I was mad when I started out. And then of course Timmy won a prize at the fair. Everything has happened since I found it, and all nice things! As long as I live I'm always going to call this summer the thimble summer."

"Well, if it's a magic thimble, I'm much obliged to it for bringing me here," said Eric.

Garnet was very happy. She was so happy, for no especial reason, that she felt as if she must move carefully so she wouldn't jar or shake the feeling of happiness. She descended from the root cautiously, and walked with even steps down through the vegetable garden and across the pasture to the slough. A green light, tranquil and diffused, glowed among the willow saplings. The water was clear and motionless.

Garnet leaned against a tree. She was so quiet that

a great blue heron, fancying itself alone, flew down between the branches and paused at the water's edge. She watched the handsome creature, with his blue crest and slender long legs, wading and darting his bill into the water. She was so near that she could see the jewel color of his little eye. He stood for a contemplative moment on one foot, still as a bird of carven stone; and in that moment it seemed to Garnet that he had become her companion; a creature who understood and shared her mood of happiness. For a second or two they stood like that in perfect stillness: and then the heron spread his heavy wings and new away.

But now the happiness was growing out of all bounds. Garnet felt that pretty soon she might burst with it, begin to fly, or that her two pigtails would stand straight up on end and sing like nightingales! she could hold it in no longer. The time had come to make a noise, and whooping at the top of her lungs, she leapt out of the shadowy willow grove.

Griselda, the finest of the Jersey cows, raised mild, reproachful eyes and stared for a long time at Garnet turning handspring after handspring down the pasture.

end